

Controlling Interruptions in A Cubicle Environment

Don't you just love those people who pop their heads over your cubicle wall or stand in your doorway and say "Do you have a second?" And is it really ever just a second? When working with my clients, I often get asked about how to control interruptions when working in a cubicle environment. This is an important question when you consider the lost time and energy every interruption represents.

Cubicle environments are great in terms of encouraging collaboration and controlling building costs, and they are very economical from both a short-term build out perspective as well as a long term reorganization point of view. These factors are traditionally what drive the cubicle environment.

The downside is that 'in person' interruptions greatly increase and are significantly harder to control with this configuration. Consider that every time you are interrupted, you lose 5 to 10 minutes getting back to the level of concentration you were at prior to the interruption. Multiply that amount of time by the number of unnecessary interruptions you get on a daily basis and there is a significant productivity loss. Unfortunately, the victim in us wants to say "But I just don't have a door to close to keep the drive-bys from happening all the time!"

All is not lost, however, and with some creativity and communication, you can establish boundaries that will help reduce unnecessary interruptions while maintaining the positive aspects of cubicles. These fall into four general categories:

Our New Microsoft Outlook Plug-In Software is Coming October 31st

Get a Free 30-Day Trial!

We are happy to announce our third new product of 2006 -- the **Take Back Your Life! 4Outlook Plug-in**. This brand-new software includes built-in MPS protocols that will speed and simplify your e-mail and task management.

This next-step software from McGhee Productivity Solutions and Standss Limited saves you time and steps as you process and organize your e-mail, calendar and tasks. With the time-saving template and prompts, you can:

- Turn action items into tasks or appointments with the click of a button
- File reference information appropriately even faster
- Write effective e-mail using the proven MPS PASS™ model
- Access coaching for your Weekly Review

Multiple tools work to your advantage, including:

• **Visual and physical boundaries** - I have seen individuals and teams create effective visual boundaries that can be utilized to indicate when a person cannot be interrupted. Some things I have had my clients successfully put in place include:

- A picture posted in a frame outside the cubicle wall that represents the cubicle inhabitant in a stressed state. When posted, it means "Do Not Disturb."
- Flags that when lowered mean interruptions are okay and when raised mean no interruptions
- Crime scene tape across doorways
- Color coded cards posted at the entry way of the cubicle. Colors can represent different things; do not disturb, available, on vacation, etc.
- Headphones

• **Tools** - Create ways for people to leave messages or drop things off for you when you cannot be interrupted:

- Have an inbox strategically located on the outside of your cubicle wall with sticky notes and a pen available so people can leave items and messages without interrupting you
- A small white board with pen for messages mounted on the outside of your cubicle wall

• **Behavior modification** - Avoid encouraging people to drop by and hang out. Some of the more common pitfalls are:

- Keeping a candy jar on your desk
- Posting cartoons on your bulletin board or at the entrance to your cubicle
- Having your chair facing the entrance to your cubicle

• **Communication** - No matter what solution you choose as an individual or team, communication is essential. Conversations should occur around:

MPS PASS Model

Implementation. A PASS model template is automatically inserted in each new e-mail or response.

MPS 4Ds for Decision

Making™. Empty your inbox! You can now create a categorized task or calendar appointment from any e-mail with a single click. Filing reference e-mails is equally simple.

Follow-up System for Sent E-

mails. When you click "send," you automatically create a task with a follow-up reminder.

Reference System

Maintenance. As business or personal objectives are placed into the Task Pad, you can simply create corresponding e-mail and My Documents folders to support your efforts.

Coaching on Key MPS

Methods/Protocols. We've built coaching into the software for your Weekly Review, Writing Effective E-Mail and MPS 4Ds for Decision Making.

Integrated Management

System View. A direct response to a customer request: now you can view your e-mail inbox in preview pane mode along with your Calendar and Task Pad.

The MPS Take Back Your Life!

4Outlook Plug-In makes it easier than ever to implement our proven methods and protocols. It is a highly cost-

- What the current state is (i.e. too many interruptions leading to distraction and inability to complete work)
- What the possible solutions are (use some of the solutions above or create your own)
- Agreement on what steps you will take
- Reinforcement of boundaries

I'd like you to create the possibility of an effective work environment. With creativity and courage you can create an environment that supports you in getting your work completed **and** allows others to communicate with you effectively! Setting and maintaining your boundaries to support you and others in completing your objectives minimizes interruptions and leads to better work-life balance. Be bold, be courageous and Take Back Your Life!

-- John Wittry, Executive Consultant

P.S.: Setting your objectives for 2007? Review our Summer newsletter, "[Gaining Focus Through Meaningful Objectives](#)."

To discuss how McGhee strategies can help you achieve your objectives more effectively, just [e-mail us](#) or contact us any time from our [web site](#).

effective tool to support your high-performance work culture.

There's a new book out by by Ed Oakley and Doug Krug called "Leadership Made Simple: Practical Solutions to Your Greatest Management Challenges." We know Ed and his work. If a very practical approach to management and leadership is of interest to you, we highly recommend you take a look. Ed and many of his partners are offering quite a few bonuses to encourage you to buy the book from Amazon.com on November 9th. Some of these rewards may be valuable to you, and others not at all. [See the information and offer](#). Remember to drop this newsletter on your calendar to make an appointment on November 9th to purchase the book if you are interested.